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BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

Paper No. 20040602

Application Number: 09/825,912
Filing Date: April 04, 2001
Appellant(s): SMITH ET AL.

Jeremy J. Curcuri
For Appellant

EXAMINER'S ANSWER

This is in response to the appeal brief filed February 25, 2004.

(1) Real Party in Interest

A statement identifying the real party in interest is contained in the brief.

(2) Related Appeals and Interferences

The brief does not contain a statement identifying the related appeals and interferences which will directly affect or be directly affected by or have a bearing on the decision in the pending appeal is contained in the brief. Therefore, it is presumed that there are none. The Board, however, may exercise its discretion to require an explicit statement as to the existence of any related appeals and interferences.

(3) Status of Claims

The statement of the status of the claims contained in the brief is correct.

(4) Status of Amendments After Final

The appellant's statement of the status of amendments after final rejection contained in the brief is correct.

(5) Summary of Invention

The summary of invention contained in the brief is correct.

(6) Issues

The appellant's statement of the issues in the brief is correct.

(7) Grouping of Claims

Appellant's brief includes a statement that claims 5, 7, 9, 16, 17, and 22 do not stand or fall together and provides reasons as set forth in 37 CFR 1.192(c)(7) and (c)(8).

(8) Claims Appealed

The copy of the appealed claims contained in the Appendix to the brief is correct.

(9) Prior Art of Record

6,067,530	Brooks, Jr. et al.	5-2000
5,164,718	Cedergren	11-1992

(10) Grounds of Rejection

The following ground(s) of rejection are applicable to the appealed claims:

Claims 1-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 (a) as being unpatentable over Brooks, Jr. et al. (US 6,067,530) in view of Cedergren (US 5,164,718). This rejection is set forth in prior Office Action, Paper No. 9.

Re claim 1, Brooks, Jr. et al. disclose a cash management system (20) comprising at least one safe (a subsystem 22 comprises a plurality of cashier stations which itself is a form of an electronic safe further including a cash register 38, controller 36 and a drop safe 24 in Fig. 1A-1B). The at least one safe further comprises a housing (Fig. 3A-3G) having an interior compartment (lockable and removable canister 46 for securing money), and an outer door (48) having a locking mechanism to control access to the interior compartment. The at least one safe further comprises a data input device (key pad 80), an electronic display (82), a connector interface (84-88 and col. 9, ll. 30-37) mounted to the housing (Fig. 3F), and a control system (36) arranged to communicate with the data input device (80), electronic device (82), connector interface (84-88) and lock mechanism, where the control system includes a processor (90 and col. 9, ll.65-67) programmed to control operation of the safe as well as operate as a central

system control (Manager Mode) when connected to at least one other remote safe (Fig. 1A and 1B) via the connector interface (reference numeral 42A) to monitor and accumulate financial and operational information for each unit (col. 6, ll. 19-31). As Brooks, Jr. et al. teach, the cash management system comprises at least one safe that is equally functional as a stand-alone system or as a device connected with other electronic safe system in a network. Since each subsystem is equipped with identical elements, any one of the cashier stations can work as a central system controller via connector interface 42A to manage cash deposits and withdrawals and generate a financial report.

Although Brooks, Jr. et al. clearly disclose the safe is operated electronically in a network environment, the reference does not specifically disclose the locking mechanism having an electronic lock mechanism.

Cedergren discloses a safe comprising an electronic lock mechanism (Fig. 1) controlled via a code lock with a unique locking code. The unique locking code is related to a predetermined unlocking signal code for an added security. The electronic lock mechanism prevents unauthorized access to the contents, which are to be transported or stored (col. 1, ll. 34-37).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to an artisan of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to further incorporate an electronic lock mechanism, as taught by Cedergren, to the cash management system of Brooks, Jr. et al. for the purposes of increasing security and prevents unauthorized access to a storage device of valuables such as safe. Furthermore, such modification of employing an electronic lock mechanism to the locking

mechanism of Brooks, Jr. et al. would have been an obvious matter of design variation, well within the ordinary skill in the art, and therefore an obvious expedient.

Re claim 2, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, where the at least one safe (24) further comprises a bill validator apparatus (44) mounted to the housing for receiving and validating bills of various denominations (col. 11, ll. 47-55), and a storage device located within the safe for storing all validated bills, wherein the processor is programmed to maintain a record of all received and validated bills (col. 11, ll. 62-67 and col. 12, ll. 1-11).

Re claim 3, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, further comprising a cash dispensing apparatus (canister 46) mounted to the housing, the cash dispensing apparatus including a set of openings in the housing arranged to be loaded with containers each containing money of a predetermined value (such as $1, $5, $10, $20, and coins or when the canister 46 is full; col. 8, ll. 7-17), and a separate opening and dispensing tray in the housing to dispense money containers (46) for removal from the safe (col. 4, ll. 4-10).

Re claim 4, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, where the control system (36) is further programmed to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money, recognize user identification data, and store transaction data and associated user identity data (individual cashier I.D.) in a memory; wherein the processor (90) is further arranged to process and sort stored transaction and operational data to generate an audit report and accounting reports (col. 12, line 40 - col. 20, line

51 discloses an operating mode and a manager mode to generate desired reports including audit and cashier activity reports).

Re claim 5, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, wherein a remote safe unit (cahier station #1-#n) is connected to the connector interface (84-88), the remote safe unit comprising a bill validator apparatus (44) mounted to a housing thereof for receiving and validating bills of various denominations (col. 11, ll. 47-55), and a storage device located within the remote safe for storing all validated bills, wherein the processor is programmed to maintain a record of all received and validated bills in the remote safe (col. 11, ll. 62-67 and col. 12, ll. 1-11).

Re claim 6, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, wherein the connection interface (84-88) comprises a communications port (Fig. 7 and col. 9, ll. 31-37) to allow communication between the control system (36) and a remote computer (43).

Re claim 7, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, wherein a remote safe unit (cashier station #1-#n) is connected to the connector interface (84-88), the remote safe unit comprising a cash dispensing apparatus (canister 46) mounted to a housing thereof, the cash dispensing apparatus including a set of openings in the housing arranged to be loaded with containers each containing money of a predetermined value (such as $1, $5, $10, $20, and coins or when the canister 46 is full; col. 8, ll. 7-17), and a separate opening (and dispensing tray in the housing to dispense money containers (46) for removal from the safe (col. 4, ll. 4-10), wherein the processor (36) is programmed to

maintain a record (col. 10, ll. 5-20 and col. 11, ll. 64-67) of all money load and dispensed from the remote safe (24).

Re claim 8, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, wherein the processor (36 in Fig. 5) is programmed to recognize different levels of user system access authority (cashier mode and manager mode).

Re claims 9 and 10, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system as recited in rejected claim 1 stated above, wherein one or more remote safe units (cashier stations #!-#n) are connected to the connector interface (42a), and the processor is further programmed to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money, recognize user identification data, and store transaction data and associated user identity data (individual cashier I.D.) in a memory; wherein the processor (90) is arranged to process and sort stored transaction and operational data to generate an individual and totaled audit and accounting reports (col. 12, line 40 - col. 20, line 51 discloses an operating mode and a manager mode to generate desired reports including audit and cashier activity reports which can be broken down to each individual cashier level).

Re claims 11, and 15, Brooks, Jr. et al. disclose a network of interconnected electronic locking and money control devices comprising:

a central processing system (controller 36) integrated with one of the locking and money control devices (such as register 38 and drop safe 24) and arranged to control operation of the integrated system (20) , wherein the central processing system (36) is connected to all other network devices (via 42A), and further arranged to communicate with all the other network devices and provide network control of all the other devices. In the Fig. 1A, each one of the

controller 36 may function as a stand-alone device or a central processing system. On the other hand, in the Fig. 1B, the store host computer 43 functions as a central processing system integrated with one of the locking and money control devices.

Although Brooks, Jr. et al. clearly disclose the safe is operated electronically in a network environment, the reference does not specifically disclose the locking mechanism having an electronic lock mechanism.

Cedergren discloses a safe comprising an electronic lock mechanism (Fig. 1) controlled via a code lock with a unique locking code. The unique locking code is related to a predetermined unlocking signal code for an added security. The electronic lock mechanism prevents unauthorized access to the contents, which are to be transported or stored (col. 1, ll. 34-37).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to an artisan of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to further incorporate an electronic lock mechanism, as taught by Cedergren, to the cash management system of Brooks, Jr. et al. for the purposes of increasing security and prevents unauthorized access to a storage device of valuables such as safe. Furthermore, such modification of employing an electronic lock mechanism to the locking mechanism of Brooks, Jr. et al. would have been an obvious matter of design variation, well within the ordinary skill in the art, and therefore an obvious expedient.

Re claim 12, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the central processing system (43) is arranged to automatically detect and assign network addresses for

devices added to the network (cashier station numbers obviously is unique to each cash register and may be considered as a network address used to identify each one of them distinctively).

Re claim 13, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the other network devices comprise a data entry subsystem (input device) arranged to receive and recognize user identification data (cashier I.D.), and transmit the data to the central processing system (43), wherein the central processing system is arranged to determine whether the user is authorized to access system (cashier ? or manager?), and controlling operation of the network device based on the authorization determination (a manager obviously has more accessibility to the system related to managing employees and operating a store).

Re claim 14, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the data entry system (input keypad) is arranged to receive the user identification data (cashier I.D.) in the form of at least a user number, electronic key, or biometric identification.

Re claim 16, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the network device is a cash dispensing system (34) the cash dispensing apparatus including a set of openings arranged to be loaded with containers each containing cash of a predetermined value (such as $1, $5, $10, $20, and coins or when the canister 46 is full; col. 8, ll. 7-17), and a separate opening and dispenser to dispense each cash containers for removal from the safe, wherein the cash dispensing apparatus is arranged to maintain an accounting of all containers and provide a report to the central processing system (43).

Re claim 17, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the network device (34) comprises a universal interface (42A) designed to communicate with a plurality types of bill validators (44) arranged to receive and validate bills of various denominations (col. 11, ll. 47-55), and a storage device for storing all validated bills, wherein the universal interface is l programmed to maintain a record of all received and validated bills and provide a report to the central processing system (43).

Re claims 18-20, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, wherein the central processing system (43) is programmed to recognize different levels of user system access authority (cashier operating mode and manager mode) as a function of time or date.

Re claim 21, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, where the central processing system (43) is programmed to assign selected devices (any of cashier stations from #1-#n) to an access group to provide flexible levels of user access.

Re claim 22, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, where the central processing system (43) is further programmed to accumulate and track deposits and withdrawals of money from all devices on the network, recognize user identification data, and store transaction data and associated user identity data (individual cashier I.D.) in a memory for each device connected to the network; wherein the central processing system is arranged to process and sort stored transaction and operational data to generate an individual and totaled audit and

accounting reports (col. 12, line 40 - col. 20, line 51 discloses an operating mode and a manager mode to generate desired reports including audit and cashier activity reports).

Re claims 23-25, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, where the central processing system (43) is programmed and arranged to generate audit and financial reports including break down of each cashier's level and for a specific time period (appendix in col. 18-20).

Re claim 26, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren disclose the cash management system in a network environment as recited in rejected claim 11 stated above, where each device (cashier stations #1-#n and printer) connected to the network is arranged to store individual configuration information, monetary totals and a selected audit information to facilitate replacement of the central processing system. Brooks, Jr. et al. discloses a modular system that may permit the replacement of any device within the network at easy (col. 7, ll. 23-30).

(11) Response to Argument

The examiner respectfully disagrees with appellant's comments and arguments as stated in the "Argument" section of the Appeal Brief, for the following reasons:

The Appellant contends that the store host computer 43 is not part of a safe (page 9, 4th paragraph). The examiner has noted the argument and fully considered and interpreted the claims as reasonably as possible within a broader perspective. After reviewing the previously cited references and analyzing the claims, the Examiner believes that the cited references still read on the recited limitations of claims presented in the present application for the following reasons.

First, the cash management system (20 or 220) of Brooks, Jr. et al. comprises a subsystem (22) that can be considered as an electronic safe. As appreciated by an artisan of ordinary skill in the art, the subsystem, in fact, comprises a plurality of electronic cash registers 38 (one form of a money control system having a locking mechanism), a controller (36) that is coupled with a drop safe (24). The controller communicates with one of the registers, the drop safe, and a shared printer or store host computer (43). Each of the subsystem 22 comprises identical elements that can function as a stand-alone device or as a device connected in a network. Since each subsystem is identical, any controller 36 of the subsystem can operate as a central system controller (host) within the network.

Second, the bi-directional arrow displayed in Fig. 1B fairly suggests that the drop safe communicates with the controller and the store host computer. Therefore, without the interconnections and bi-directional communications, it cannot provide its predetermined functions to the fullest capacity as designed. Accordingly, the cash management system would include the drop safe and interfaces including the controller and host computer that communicate with the safe.

With respect to the dependent claims, Brooks, Jr. et al. in view of Cedergren teach or fairly suggest the claimed electronic lock and money control system comprising, among other things, a bill validator, a cash dispenser and a control system including function of generating financial reports through a communication network.

For the reasons and discussions aforementioned, it is believed that the rejections should be sustained.

For the above reasons, it is believed that the rejections should be sustained.

Respectfully submitted,

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June 2, 2004

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